

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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FM USMISSION NATO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 0049

INFO AMEMBASSY ANKARA

AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

C O N F I D E N T I A L USNATO 0739

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: NATO, PFOR, PINT, UR

SUBJ: BREZHNEV

REF: USNATO 0628 (NOTAL)

1. AT FEB 11 POLADS, TURKISH REP (ERALP) GAVE SUMMARY OF TURKISH EMBASSY MOSCOW REPORT ON BREZHNEV'S CURRENT POSITION. NOTING THAT SOVIET PRESS IN LATE 1974 CONTINUED TO HAVE FREQUENT REFERENCES TO BREZHNEV, TURKISH EMBASSY REPORTED THERE ARE THREE SCHOOLS OF THOUGHT AMONG EMBASSIES IN MOSCOW AS TO HOW TO INTERPRET THIS PRESS ATTENTION: (A) IT SHOWED BREZHNEV HAD NO POLITICAL PROBLEMS; (B) PRESS REFERENCES TO BREZHNEV ARE BEING USED TO CONCEAL THE EXISTENCE OF OPPOSITION TO HIM WITHIN THE SOVIET LEADERSHIP (THOSE HOLDING THIS VIEW SAY THAT PRESS REFERENCES TO KHRUSHEHEV WERE FREQUENT UNTIL JUST BEFORE HIS OUSTER IN OCTOBER 1964); (C) PRESS REFERENCES TO BREZHNEV MAY BE INTENDED TO REASSURE THE OUTSIDE WORLD OF THE CONTINUITY OF SOVIET POLICIES.

2. RE POSSIBLE SUCCESSION TO BREZHNEV, TURKISH REP SAID CIRCUMSTANCES SURROUNDING SUCCESSION WOULD HAVE STRONG INFLUENCE ON DETERMINING WHO WOULD EMERGE AS TOP SOVIET LEADER. TURKS THINK CONFIDENTIAL

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THAT IN THE EVENT OF BREZHNEV'S SUDDEN DEATH, KIRILENKO WOULD HAVE THE BEST CHANCE TO SUCCEED HIM. IF BREZHNEV RESIGNED DUE TO BAD HEALTH, KULAKOV OR MAZUROV MIGHT GAIN TOP SPOT. IF BREZHNEV WERE OUSTED, HIS LIKELIEST SUCCESSORS MIGHT BE SHELEPIN OR POLYANSKI.

RE BREZHNEV'S HEALTH, TURKS REPORTED THAT A "RELIABLE WESTERN JOURNALIST" IN MOSCOW HAD TOLD THEM THAT BREZHNEV HAD UNDERGONE AN OPERATION FOR CANCER OF THE CHIN AROUND NEW YEAR. AT FIRST, BREZHNEV'S CONDITION APPEARED TO IMPROVE, BUT IT LATER DETERIORATED AND HE IS NOW UNDER TREATMENT AT AN ARMY HOSPITAL NEAR MOSCOW.

3. TURKISH REP ALSO REPORTED THAT RUMORS ARE CIRCULATING IN MOSCOW THAT A CENTRAL COMMITTEE PLENUM WILL BE HELD LATER THIS MONTH.

4. DANISH REP (VILLANDSEN) SAID DANISH EMBASSY IN MOSCOW HAD INTERESTING REPORT ON BREZHNEV'S SITUATION FROM "PREVIOUSLY RELIABLE" DANISH JOURNALIST FOR DANISH COMMUNIST NEWSPAPER. ACCORDING TO THIS REPORT, THERE ARE AT PRESENT THREE DIFFERING INTERPRETATIONS OF BREZHNEV'S DISAPPEARANCE: (A) THAT IT IS THE RESULT OF OPPOSITION WITHIN THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE, (B) THAT HE IS SICK BUT EXPECTED TO RECOVER AND (C) THAT HE HAS TERMINAL CANCER. THE DANISH JOURNALIST BELIEVED THE LAST POSITION TO BE TRUE AND

SAID IT HAD BEEN CONFIRMED TO HIM BY A "HIGH-RANKING RELIABLE SOURCE". THE DANISH JOURNALIST LATER INFORMED THE DANISH EMBASSY THAT HE HAD RECEIVED A TELEPHONE CALL TELLING HIM NOT TO ENGAGE IN SUCH SPECULATION AND THAT THE SITUATION WOULD RESOLVE ITSELF WITHIN THE NEXT TWO WEEKS. THE DANES SPECULATE THAT THIS PRE- DICTION MAY BE RELATED TO PROSPECTIVE CENTRAL COMMITTEE PLENUM. BRUCE

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